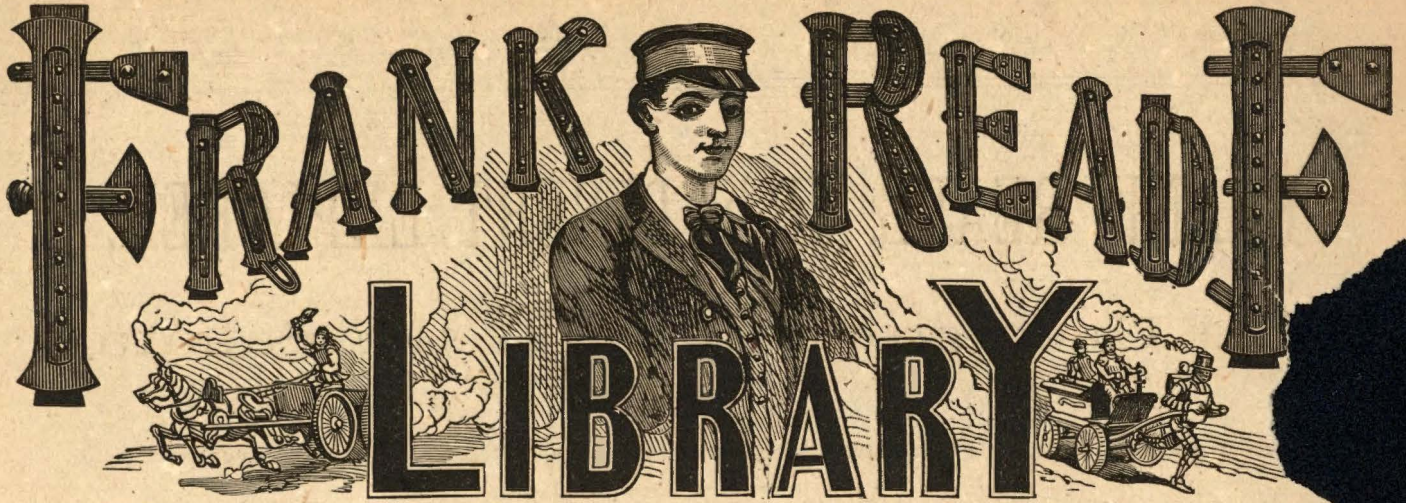


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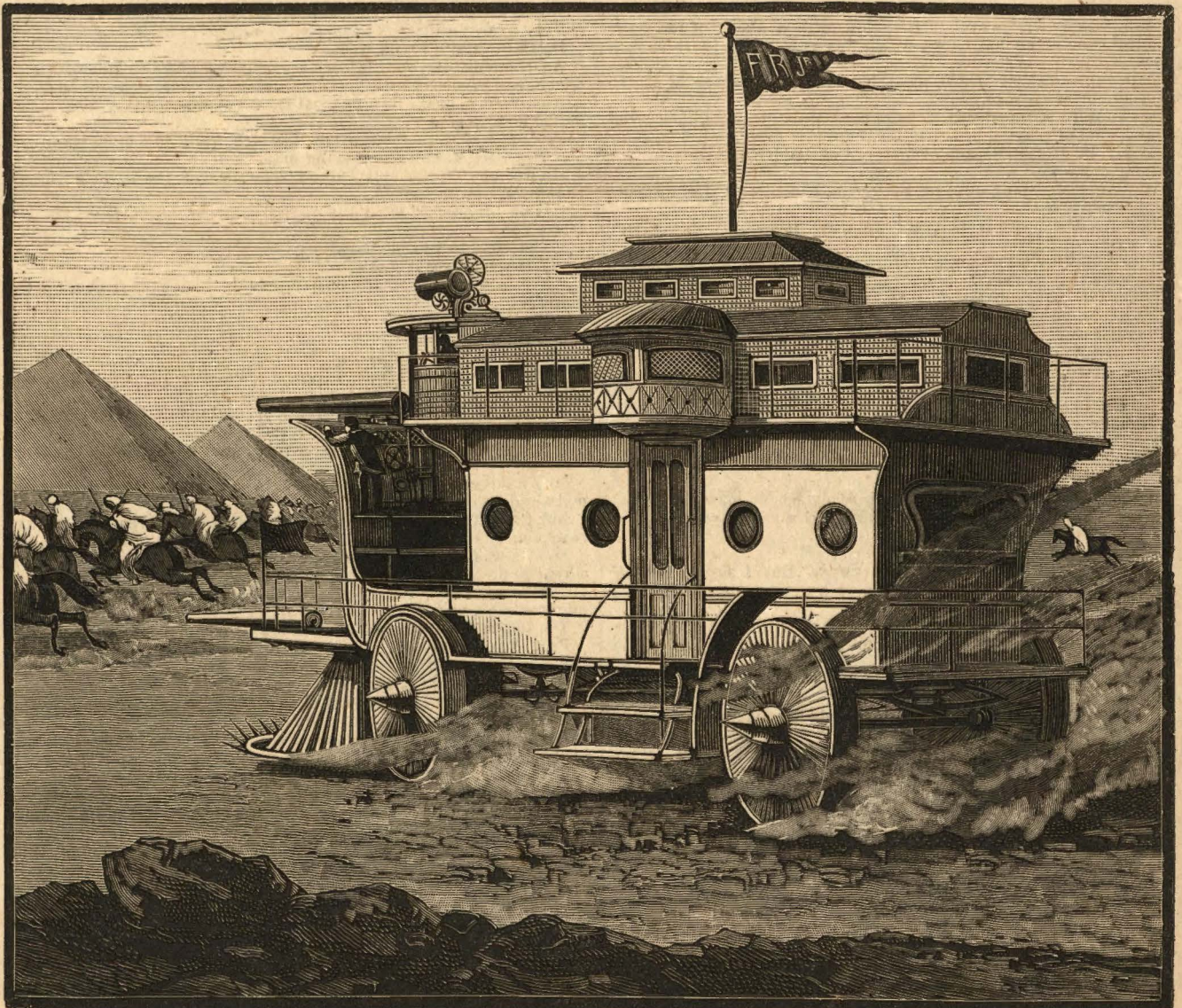
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Frank Reade, Jr.'s **Desert Explorer; or,** THE UNDERGROUND CITY OF THE SAHARA.

By "NONAME."



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FRANK READE, JR.'S DESERT EXPLORER;

OR, The Underground City of the Sahara.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Search for the Sea Serpent," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Electric Buckboard," etc.

CHAPTER I.

Who has not heard of Frank Reade, Jr., the famous young American inventor and explorer? The world over his name is in every household.

His wonderful exploits in every land upon the globe had won for him a reputation and a fame such as few men of his generation could boast of.

Frank came honestly by his talent as an inventor, for his father was a genius before him, and really founded the lovely little city of Reade-town, U. S. A., where were the workshops and factories in which the inventions were perfected.

Frank Reade, Jr., was a handsome, athletic young man, and bore the unmistakable stamp of a genius.

He was universally beloved in all circles and particularly by two very devoted and honest servants, Barney and Pomp, who accompanied him in all his travels.

Barney was a genuine type of Irishman, with a shock of red hair, a comical mug and a native wit which was as brilliant in its scintillations as a meteoric shower.

Pomp was a thickset negro, coal black, and possessed of all the quaint humor of his race.

The two were warm friends, though constantly bickering in a jovial way and fond of playing practical jokes on each other.

One day Pomp met Barney coming out of the drafting room of the Reade machine works.

"Hi, dar, 'Ish," sang out the Ethiopian, cheerily. "Jes' de chille I wanted fo' to see."

"Begorra, the desire is mutual," retorted Barney. "Phwat will yez have?"

"I jes' got a lily bit ob news."

"Phwat's that yez say?"

"It am a solemncholy fac'."

"Be jabbers, phwat is it?"

"Marse Frank jes' tell me fo' to git ready eberyting fo' we'se gwine to de Sahara to-morrow!"

Barney executed a clog dance.

"Yez don't mean it, naygur!"

"Yo' bet I do, 'Ish."

"Termorrer, eh?"

"Yah!"

The two jovial souls embraced each other and waltzed around the yard. They were in high spirits.

"Well, be jabbers, the machine is all ready fer the masther!" cried Barney. "Shure, I put the lasht av the stores aboard to-day!"

"Yo' don't mean dat, chille?"

"Yes, I do!"

"I jes go an' tell Marse Frank right away. But I say, honey, yo' member dat curus ole man what come here a week ago an' axed fo' to look at de Explorer?"

"Phwat of it?"

"Golly, dat am Prof. Alwise, of de Smithsonian Institute, an' he am jes gwine fo' to go wif us."

"Yez don't mean it?"

"Don' yo' fo'get it, honey!"

"But, bejabbers, phwat are we'se going to de Sahara for anyway?"

"Don' yo' know dat? Shuah, it am fo' to find a sunken city wha' used to once be top ob de ground when de big desert warn't jes' so much ob a desert. It am de underground city ob de Sahara."

"Begorra, that's a foine idea. I loike the lyls av it."

"Jes' hol' your breff, honey! Dar am fun ahead, fo' when we gits into de big desert wif de Explorer we'se gwine fo' to hab some gallus times."

And away went Pomp to find his master, while Barney lit his dudden and muttered:

"Shure, I knew we'd not long be idle now that the young masther has the Explorer finished."

Pomp succeeded in finding Frank in due course of time.

The young inventor was in one of the drafting rooms, arranging some valuable papers previous to leaving home for an indefinite period.

It was arranged that the machine works were to be shut down during his absence, for they were run under his personal supervision, and there would be no one to direct them in his absence.

Pomp burst in upon Frank and cried:

"Marse Frank, eberyting am all ready. Yo' am jes' to say de wo'd an' de Explorer will start."

"Good!" cried Frank, "I am glad to hear that. Well, my faithful fellow, stand ready to make the start to-morrow if nothing happens. Ah, what was that?"

A sharp rapping was heard upon the door below.

Visitors were never admitted to the drafting rooms, so Pomp shouted:

"Who am it?"

"Prof. Alwise of Washington!" was the reply.

"Wait a moment, sah!"

"It is the professor," said Frank, putting on his coat and hat.

"Very likely he wishes to see me. I will go down."

Down the stairs Frank went.

As he opened the door below he was brought face to face with a patrician and intellectual looking old man, who was well dressed and carried what looked like a medical case, but was really a case of scientific instruments.

Prof. Alwise wore a white beard, which hung low upon his breast, and was altogether a fine looking man.

He was one of the most noted scientists of the age, and he and Frank were warm friends.

"Well, professor," cried the young inventor, warmly, "I am glad to see you."

"The same to you, my boy."

"You are all ready?"

"Yes, and more than anxious to see that famous machine, the Explorer."

"You shall see it!"

"Is it all equipped?"

"Every bit. Come this way!"

Frank led the way across the yard. Passing through a door they entered a large building with a high trussed roof.

Beneath this was the new invention, the famous Desert Explorer, which had been designed and built expressly for the purpose of discovering and exploring the mysterious underground city of the Great Sahara.

This underground city had always been regarded by travelers as a myth and a fable.

But Prof. Alwise had become convinced after research that it was a reality and did indeed exist, and he had resolved to prove this.

So this was why Frank Reade, Jr. had built the Desert Explorer, a vehicle designed for long trips across the burning sands and also for battle with any savage tribes of Bedouins or desert natives they might come across.

The Desert Explorer stood before the two explorers.

Prof. Alwise wrapped in amazement stood silently for some moments gazing at this triumph of inventive genius.

He was held literally spellbound.

"Upon my word!" he gasped finally, "I have never seen anything so wonderful. This is a great triumph!"

The Explorer was a four wheeled vehicle of large dimensions and its main body was shaped not unlike an old fashioned mail stage.

But the details would fill a volume and were extremely varied.

To attempt an adequate description of the invention is almost out of the question. But we will endeavor to present a few of its wonderful features.

The main or coach-shaped body of the Explorer was made of thinly rolled but tough steel capable of resisting a bullet.

Above this was built what might be called a square cabin of the same material, and which extended from the high pointed dasher in front, to the extreme rear of the vehicle.

Above this were sides and a roof of steel netting impervious to bullets, and sheltering what might be called the upper deck.

In this were windows with gratings and sliding screens.

Midway in the netting was a bow shaped balcony and window of

tough plate glass. A railing extended along the edge of the balcony.

Forward was a section of plate glass windows, and here was the steering gear of the vehicle which enabled the forward wheels to be turned in any direction. It may be called fitly the pilot-house.

Along the main or lower cabin, there extended an outer platform and guard rail. A door opened into the interior of the vehicle at this point.

There were round bull's-eye windows in the cabin wall, which could also be utilized for loop holes in case of an attack.

Forward on the high dasher was a light electric dynamite gun, an invention of Frank's, and for the secret of which the various governments of the world had offered fabulous sums.

It could throw an explosive projectile a mile with ease.

Under the dasher was a long, steel ram with a sharp blade. Below this was a prow or cow-catcher similar to those in use upon ordinary locomotives.

The running gear consisted of four wheels with steel tires, spokes and hubs, all driven by rods connecting with the electric engines, which were in the lower cabin.

All these properties were so cleverly adjusted that the Explorer made a neat, trim and handsome vehicle.

This is a rough and incomplete description of the exterior of the machine. Frank described all in detail to the professor and then said:

"Now let us take a look at the interior."

The interior of the machine was indeed a wonderful thing to view.

Entering by the door in the side one stood in the main cabin, if such it might be called.

It was a little palace so far as richness of appointments went.

Of course the space was small, but there were cushioned seats which at night were utilized as couches, a rich, soft carpet, a small library of useful books, a lavatory, a stand of small arms and many bits of bric-a-brac and such works of art as were appropriate and economical in space.

As the professor viewed the scene, he cried, impulsively:

"Frank, this is grand. Indeed, it is a palace on wheels."

A little stairway went up to the upper cabin or deck, and here all was different.

There were tools and various equipments, lockers filled with ammunition and all the necessary articles for defense.

But the most interesting visit of all was down to the engine room which was below the main cabin.

Here was the wonderful dynamo and electric machinery, a secret invention of Frank's by which the explorer was given its motive power.

This completed the inspection of the wonderful new invention.

CHAPTER II.

CAIRO AND THE PYRAMIDS.

To say that Prof. Alwise was delighted would be a mild statement. He could hardly find words to express himself.

"This is the crowning event of my life!" he cried, enthusiastically, "to think of traveling across the Sahara in such wonderful fashion. Only think of the opportunities I shall have which have been denied other scientists."

"I hope you will not suffer disappointment in your expectations," said Frank.

"How can I?"

"Why, some serious thing might happen to balk your plans."

"What?"

"For instance we may be overcome by some hostile tribe of natives and the machine so injured that we would be compelled to abandon the trip."

"I am too old a man to bear disappointment keenly," replied the professor. "If such a thing happens, well and good. It is the decree of Fate. I cannot blame you in any way."

"But we shall hope that nothing of the kind will occur," said Frank, confidently. "Now, professor, I would advise that you carry all your effects aboard, for we shall start to-morrow sure."

"I will not fail to do that," replied the scientist.

With this they left the building.

The professor went back to his hotel and Frank entered his own private office, where he found Pomp.

"Hi dar, Marse Frank!" cried the darky. "Here am a lettah fo' yo'."

"A letter!" exclaimed Frank.

"Yes, sah, an' I spec's how it am berry important by de looks ob it. It didn't cum by mail, sah. A gemmen lef it hyar jes' a lily while ago."

Frank took the epistle, which was quite voluminous, and proceeded to read it.

Now it had been impossible to maintain as a secret the projected trip of the Explorer.

The newspapers got hold of the affair, and ever eager for interesting news it traveled fast.

Everybody was interested in the projected scheme.

Not everybody had ever heard before of the buried City of the Sahara, but they were just as much interested in it.

It seemed that the writer of the letter was one who was more than ordinarily interested and Frank read with surprise:

"DEAR MR. READE.

"I am a stranger to you and no doubt you may think it forward in me to write and ask of you a great favor. But I think you can

give aid to a sorrowing father, and I know you will never refuse to perform a Christian act.

"I hear that you are going to the Sahara in quest of a buried city. Now the favor I would ask is this: Some years ago I was traveling in the East with my son Harold and daughter Edith. At that time Edith was about twelve and Harold eighteen years old. When a few miles from Cairo we were set upon by Bedouins, and though our guard fought well, a dozen were killed and as many more captured. Among the unfortunate ones to fall into the power of the Bedouins was Harold and my daughter Edith.

"They were carried away captives into the desert, and though every effort was made by the Sultan and the Khedive no trace of them has ever been found.

"You can understand the sorrow of my heart, and I am willing to pay a large reward for their rescue. If it is in your power to find them during my stay in the Sahara I will communicate with you the quickest way. Sincerely,

"Yours hopefully,

"EDGAR BARCOMBE.

"New York."

Frank read the epistle through twice, then he took up a pen and wrote a telegraph message as follows:

"DEAR MR. BARCOMBE,—Your request shall receive my entire attention. If it is possible for me to find any trace of your lost children during my stay in the Sahara I will communicate with you the quickest way. Sincerely,

FRANK READE, JR.

Frank pressed a bell and gave this message to Pomp, who answered the call.

Then he went hastily about his final preparations for leaving Readestown.

Before nightfall all was ready.

Prof. Alwise had placed all his effects aboard the Explorer.

The next morning at an early hour a special train took the machine and its inmates out of Readestown.

A great crowd saw the departure, cheering the travelers wildly. Straight to New York the special proceeded. Here all went aboard a steamer bound for the Mediterranean.

The voyage across the Atlantic was without incident of thrilling sort.

In due time they passed through the Straits of Gibraltar and entered the Mediterranean. The steamer stopped at Corsica and Messina, and then proceeded directly to Suez.

Here disembarkation was made. The little town was electrified by the appearance of the Explorer.

But permits had been obtained from the Sultan to pass through the land of the Pharaohs.

So nobody made an attempt to hinder the travelers.

It required some little time to adjust the electrical machinery, but it was finally accomplished.

Then farewell was taken of the people on the steamer, and as the travelers climbed aboard, away went the Explorer upon its grand trip into the desert.

It was Frank's purpose to cut straight into the desert.

Prof. Alwise had located the sunken city as in the lower verge of the Sahara, and a long ways off.

So little time was wasted in the vicinity. Leaving Cairo on the north the Explorer went booming across the barren country.

Out-of-the-way roads were taken as much as possible.

But hamlets were passed. Caravans and traveling Arabs were met and everywhere they threw up their hands in surprise and half terror.

The Explorer was a strange sight to them indeed. As an example of their curiosity after leaving each dingy town, the machine was followed by a motley horde of horsemen, intent on following and yelling for baksheesh until distanced.

Vineyards and groves of figs and olives and dates were passed by. Then the sands of the desert burst into view.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, wildly, "dere am de flags yo' read about in de Bible."

The pyramids were in view dead ahead. For the purpose of taking a cursory glance at them Frank caused the Explorer to bear down that way.

There they were surely, the wonder of centuries, those mighty structures of stone. The party inspected them with interest.

"Bejabbers, there was some hod carryin' to build those things," cried Barney. "Shure, I wonder if they had strikes in those days?"

"Golly, dey didn' hab no Knights ob Labor den, I reckon," cried Pomp. "Ebery odder man was a slave."

"Begorra, I'm glad I wan't livin' thin," ejaculated Barney. "Shure, I'd niver carry the hod fer sich barbarians."

"It is indeed fortunate for you that you are enjoying the privileges of the laborer of the present day," declared Prof. Alwise. "They were indeed the much oppressed in those olden days, for it is beyond doubt that those pyramids were built by slaves."

The monuments to the oppression of the dark ages were quickly left behind and the machine bore to the southwest.

This was directly into the heart of the desert, and as the Explorer bowled on over the sands all signs of habitation began to fade from view.

The day was close and sultry.

All about was the wide, trackless expanse of drifting sand.

It was a desolate and heartless scene, and as the travelers, one and all, reflected upon the mighty perils which they were daring, it was not strange that each should experience a sort of shiver.

Would the same fate reward them that had overtaken thousands of caravans in the past?

Frank Reade, Jr., was the most confident of any.

He knew his machine well, and that it could not be easily overcome by the desert storms.

It was well equipped for attack from any of the wandering Arab tribes. As for the danger of starvation that was out of the question.

There were supplies aboard for a period of three months. It was not likely that they would be that length of time in the desert.

The day was a stifling one.

All donned light suits, built for the climate, of white duck and cork such as are used by explorers in India.

Equipped they were able to keep quite comfortable.

Rotation of the machine created some current of air, and this added to the comfort of all.

The machine proved herself far beyond Frank's most sanguine expectations.

As she bowled on over the desert was a delight to all on board.

The tired wheels rolled over the sands with the greatest of ease, despite the tremendous weight.

The desert now began to assume an uneven and rolling aspect. The dark shadows began to creep up from the horizon. With the setting of the sun, as is the case in all level countries, darkness came on almost immediately.

Frank turned on the search-light and for two miles ahead it showed up a pathway of brilliant light.

It would have been possible to travel by night, but Frank decided not to do so.

So he said:

"We'll camp here."

The machine was brought to a halt upon the top of a roll in the plain.

Frank shut off the engines, and Barney and Pomp proceeded to make all ready for remaining in the vicinity over night.

Pomp was a dandy cook and soon had a steaming repast in the little cabin.

With the coming of night in the desert, the air always becomes cool and it was even chilly.

Yet for all this, the travelers remained long on the upper deck. Barney brought out his fiddle and played some Irish jigs.

Pomp produced his banjo and sang plantation melodies until near midnight.

Then Frank and Prof. Alwise turned in.

It was arranged to divide the watch between Barney and Pomp.

Pomp went below for a brief snooze and Barney took up the task of sentinel.

The Celt had not been long at his post when a strange sound came to his ears. It was a distant prolonged howl.

"Be jabbers that's quare," he muttered. "If I didn't know better I'd swear I was out on the American plains an' that was a kyote!"

He went to the rail and listened long to the distant puzzling sounds.

CHAPTER III.

BARNEY BAGS SOME GAME.

THE yelps and howls now seemed to come from all points of the compass and Barney with sudden inspiration exclaimed:

"Begorra, I'll mighty soon find out phwat it is!"

He went at once to the searchlight.

It was but a moment's work to turn it on. Out onto the desert flashed the pathway of light.

Wherever it struck uncouth figures galloped out of sight into the gloom.

Once Barney caught a good fair glimpse of one of them and an instant comprehension burst upon him.

"Bedad, it's hyenas they are!" he cried, "shure there's millions av thim!"

The hyena is the scavenger of the desert.

Woe to the luckless traveler who falls exhausted after dark. If he is at all helpless before morn the dread hyena will find him and rend him to pieces.

Wherever caravans sink and perish there the hyena finds occupation. A loathsome hideous animal they are.

Barney knew that they were hundreds in number about the machine.

The Celt was possessed of a keen desire to exterminate a few of them, but if he fired at them he would rouse the sleepers on board.

So a different idea occurred to him, and he hastened to put it into execution.

Descending to the lower platform, he carried a long coil of wire from the dynamos out upon the plain for fully a hundred yards.

The beasts were snapping all about him, but none of them dared to attack him.

Barney made a few circles with the wire and then returned to the Explorer.

It was easy work to connect the wire and the dynamos, setting the latter at work.

A terrific current surged over the wire.

The Celt knew that sooner or later some of the beasts would run across it.

Then he hurried on deck, and bringing the search-light to bear on the spot, waited for the fun.

He had not long to wait.

The hyenas went scurrying back and forth across the pathway of light. Suddenly one of them struck the wire.

There was a piercing yelp, a convulsive leap in the air, and a dead hyena lay on the sand.

The shock had proved instantaneously fatal.

There was a moment's lull, and then down upon the dead hyena descended a score of ravenous beasts.

They did not scruple to eat one of their number, when helpless or dead. In a few moments nothing would be left of the unfortunate beast but its bones.

But the attacking hyenas, one after another, came in contact with the deadly wire.

The result was thrilling. Right and left they were hurled. Each shock was fatal.

Unwitting the cause of the death of their mates, the ravenous beasts kept coming.

Not until they were piled so deep on the wire, that much of the force of the current was lost, did they desist.

Then the shock received, while it was not fatal, at least was a sufficient warning to the remaining hyenas to send them yelping in terror across the plain.

Barney was a delighted witness of the deadly work of the electric current.

The Celt placed his hands on his sides and roared with laughter. To him it was very funny.

This had reached Pomp's ears below, and he had come scrambling up. It was near time for the darky's watch anyway.

"Ki dar, I'ish, wha' am yo' up to anyway?" cried the astonished darky.

"Shure, wud yez luk fer yerself?" cried the amused Celt. "If yez can bag more game than that in wan night, let me see yez do it."

The darky, in utter amazement, gazed at the spectacle.

"Fo' de lan's sake!" he gasped, "howebber, chile, did yo' kill so many ob dem critters as all dat?"

"Can't yez see fer yerself?"

"Wid de wire, chile?"

"Ivery bit."

"Golly yo' glory! Dat am de bigges' sight I eber seed in mah life. Dat makes me tink ob de time I used to go possum huntin' down in Georgy—"

"Arrah, howld on now, naygur. Don't yez go givin' me any Munchausen stories. If yez do, begorra, I'll hit yez wid a clobber."

"Yo' don't want to try fo' to do dat ting, chile."

"Well, go an' wid yer sthory!"

"Well, me an' ole Marse Godfrey went out possuming one night. Ole marse he carry de bag an' I jes' go long an' hit dem off de branches wif a stick. Well, we jes' got in a patch ob ole scrub oak when ole marse he say: 'Clar fo' goodness, Pomp, I nebber seed sich a lot ob possums in one place afore in mah life.'

"Hol' yo' place, honey. I says jez keep de end ob dat bag open. An' den I begin knockin' dem possums down an' puttin' ob dem in de bag. Well, fo' de Lor's sakes, chile, we fill dat bag and jes' went around knocking ob 'em down fo' fun."

"Ole marse says I declar, Pomp, it am jes a plty fo' to see all ob dese possums go to waste dis-a-way, s'pose yo' go up to de house an' yoke up de steers an' come along down wid de big waggin. But jes' at dat moment I wuz tuk wid a weakness in de knees an' jes' knowed I nebber end walk up to de house, so a happy thought jes' struck me."

"Hol' on, Marse Godfrey, I sez. I hab a plan wuf two ob dat. Jes' yo' wait one lily moment. Den I went ober to a wire fence neah by, an' peeled off a long coil ob dat wire. It mus' hab been a half mile long."

"Den, as fast as ole marse knocked de possums off de trees, whar dey wuz hanging by dere tails, I jes' strung 'em on de wire like dey wuz beads. Well, clar fo' goodness, honey, we jes' cleaned dat oak grove out, an' filled dat half mile ob wire chuck up wid possums. When morning cum we jes' counted dem, an' how many possums does yo' s'pose was on dat wire?"

"Will yez say?"

"Jes' four thousand an' one. I frowed dat one away fo' to make de number eben fo' luck."

Barney glared at Pomp for a moment, then with a wild whoop he dashed forward, making a crack at him.

"Yez infernal loiar!" he yelled. "I'll give yez four thousand an' one tumps fer telling me sich a loie. Have at yez!"

"Keep yo' han's off me, chile," spluttered Pomp.

But the next moment they were rolling upon the deck of the wagon in a lively wrestle.

In the excitement of the struggle neither gave thought to the gangway near, which led down the side of the vehicle to the ground.

Rolling over and over, the two jokers suddenly went plunging down this. They struck the ground with a force which momentarily stunned them.

Barney was the first up, and as he gained his feet he was about to make another dive at Pomp, when a sight caught his gaze which gave him a shock and drove all further thoughts of frolic for the time being from his mind.

Down the pathway of light from the search-light he saw a body of horsemen.

They were half a mile distant over the dreary waste.

Yet Barney could see that they were making for the wagon full speed.

"Whurroo!" he yelled. "Wud yez git up, naygur, quick? Shure there's danger comin'!"

The Celt's startling words at once sobered Pomp.

He was upon his feet instant.

"Yo' don' say!" he gasped. "Wha' am de trubble, I'ish—"

Then he paused. He also caught sight of the advancing horsemen. The darky gave a startled yell.

"It am de Arabs!" he cried. "Git aboard dar, chile, jes' as quick as yo' can. We'se gwise to wake Marse Frank."

But Barney needed no prompting.

He was already scaling the gang ladder. Pomp went up also, and they drew the ladder after them.

Then Barney rushed into the pilot-house and touched an electric button.

There was a thrilling alarm given by a resounding bell which brought the sleepers out of their berths.

Frank Reade, Jr., half dressed came rushing on deck. The professor was just behind him.

"What's the matter?" cried the young inventor, excitedly. "Did you ring the alarm, Barney?"

"Wud yez luk!" cried the Celt.

He pointed down the pathway of light. The thud of horses' hoofs in the sand could now be heard and the whole cavalcade pulled up not a hundred yards distant.

They were seen as plainly as in broad daylight.

It was easily seen that they were of the genus Arab, wild and lawless and armed to the teeth.

They were fully a hundred in number and their general appearance would seem to indicate that they meant business.

For a moment they sat upon their superb steeds in the electric light looking like statues.

Wild and picturesque objects were those lawless children of the desert. It was evidently the electric light which had attracted them to the spot from miles away.

They regarded the wagon plainly with sheer amazement; Frank went to the search-light and focused its rays full upon them.

The Arabs instinctively shielded their eyes at this and several of them wheeled their horses and drew their yataghans or swords.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Prof. Alwise. "Are they going to attack us?"

"We will guard against that," said Frank, as he went to the dasher and covered the troop with the electric gun, at the same moment putting a projectile in the breach.

But at this moment one of the Arabs rode nearer the Explorer waving his lance.

It was evident that he wished to open a parley.

Frank stepped to the rail and made a friendly signal. The fellow now drew quite near.

His horse pranced and neighed in fear of the electric light, but the Arab chieftain showed himself a superb horseman and controlled him easily.

Then in French he cried:

"Effendi, I salute thee! What dost thou in the desert?"

"I am an American, and I have come to search for the Underground City," replied Frank, boldly.

The sheik reeled in his saddle, and for a moment seemed greatly excited. Then he made a warning gesture.

CHAPTER IV.

HORRORS OF THE DESERT.

"EFFENDI, the American is wise and clever!" he cried. "His caravan goes on wheels and is a wonderful chariot, but he will never find the city underground; that is a secret of the desert. Thousands like effendi now lie dead under the deep sands. Go back to Cairo!"

The sheik's manner was impressive and his words forcible.

To Prof. Alwise they seemed to carry a terrifying ring, for he said nervously:

"Frank, I am afraid we are a bit rash in venturing here without a guard from the sultan."

"Guard be hanged!" cried Frank, impatiently. "What do I care for such threats? Why, one touch of my finger, and with my electric gun yonder I can blow him and his dirty crew into eternity!"

Prof. Alwise felt the conviction of Frank's words, yet he had a wholesome horror of taking human life.

"I hope we will not have to do that!" he said.

"We will not, if they do not trouble us!" replied Frank. "If they do I promise you they shall get the worst of it!"

Then he made reply to the sheik.

"My Arab friend!" he said, pointedly. "I'm not going to have any trouble with you if I can help it. But I am in the desert to find the underground city. I shall not turn back!"

Something like a Mahometan curse dropped from the sheik's lips.

"Then you will not accept the warning!" he hissed.

"I must decline to!"

"By the beard of the prophet then, you shall go no farther. When Bel Ashan says that, all the tribes of Mahomet from Mecca to Deccan will arise against thee. Take the warning!"

With this the Sheik wheeled his horse and dashed away.

The troop of Arabs circled their horses in echelon for a moment and then they discharged their long guns in the air and went racing away over the sandy plain like a whirlwind.

They flashed out of the radius of the searchlight and were instantly lost to view.

Nothing more of them was seen that night. But there was no more sleep for any of the travelers.

The rest of the night was occupied in careful watch and in discussing the situation.

"It is my opinion that we are going to have serious trouble with those fellows," declared the professor, positively.

"Undoubtedly," agreed Frank; "but I do not think we need fear them greatly. I have no doubt but that we can handle them all right enough."

"I hope so," said the scientist, with a shrug of the shoulders.

The professor was a courageous man, but much averse to fighting. Barney's brow knit harshly and he growled:

"Bejabers, I'd loike the fun av a scrimmage wid them haythins! Shure they would moighty quick foin out that they were in hot company I'm thinkin'."

"Dat am de kin' ob talk," spluttered Pomp. "'I done fink de bes' fing we can do is to gib dem a good lickin'."

"Roight yez are fer wanst, naygur!" cried Barney, heartily. "Shure we're bound to agree on that p'int anyway."

"It ain't no fault ob mine dat we don' agree all de time!" declared Pomp stiffly. "When yo' kin quit jollying dis chile den we'se gwine fo' to talk about peace."

"Bejabers, av that's what thrubbles ye don't yez worry any more!" cried Barney. "It's aven up we air an' if yez say the worrud all past debts are off an' we are square."

"Does yo' mean that?"

Pomp approached until he could look deep into Barney's lively blue eyes.

"Ivery worrud av it!"

"Den by golly it's a go!" cried the coon. "We am quit square. An' now I reckon we'se gwine to go an' lick dem sharks ob Arabs out ob dere boots."

"Begorra, I'm wid yez!"

So the truce was made. But like all previous efforts it was destined to prove a hollow one.

Morning came and at the first breaking of light in the East the Explorer was under way.

Once more it went skimming over the desert sands.

Frank held strictly to his course and straight to the southward the machine kept on. Nothing was seen of Bel Ashan or his gang of Bedouins.

However, Frank did not expect this, at least not for some hours, for he reckoned that the sheik would first arouse all the tribes in that part of the desert.

The sun came up hot and pitiless, and beat down upon the desert sands with fearful intensity.

Now, the rolling character of the vast waste ceased, and as far as the eye could reach, all that could be seen was a level expanse of glistening white sand.

On over this the Explorer rolled.

Half the day passed without any exciting incident. Then Barney, who was in the pilot-house, suddenly brought the machine to a halt.

Frank and Prof. Alwise came rushing forward.

"What's the matter, Barney?" cried the young inventor.

"Shure, sor, I'm not knowing meself phwat it is!" cried the Celt. "Wud yez luk over yender?"

All looked in the direction indicated, and there in the sands was seen a long line of ivory whiteness.

"Great heavens!" gasped Frank, "they are bleaching bones!"

"Bones is it, sor?" cried the Celt, "phwat wud be afther bringing av' them here?"

Frank took the wheel and ran the machine nearer to the line of white.

There was no doubt of the truth of his statement.

For miles ahead there extended the glistening white line, heaps of bones strewn along irregularly.

Some were human bones, others were of camels and horses. There were also remains of saddles, rusted guns, swords and other articles too numerous to mention.

"A caravan!" cried Frank, "overtaken by a sand-storm or some terrible wave of heat, it has been stricken down in its tracks."

This was evidently true.

All had heard of the dreaded simoom and knew well enough what it meant. A caravan, miles in length and carrying no doubt thousands of dollars worth of rich goods, had thus met its destruction.

The travelers gazed upon the horrible scene with strange sensations.

What mute evidence this was of the by no means exaggerated perils of the desert.

Its voracious maw had swallowed up many a human life, many a host such as this.

Many a treasure lay beneath its shifting sands. Hundreds, thousands of unwitting victims had found their last resting place there.

The Explorer was allowed to follow the course of the caravan for some ways.

It was a sickening, sorrowful sight to see those human skeletons bleaching there in the hot sun.

"But they are not the only victims," declared Frank. "This desert is full of just such scenes."

"May Heaven rest their souls!" declared Prof. Alwise. "I hope we may escape that fate."

"We must look out for the deadly simoom."

"But how can we do that?"

"Keep a good lookout, and if we see it approaching put on speed and run away from it."

The professor shook his head.

"I doubt if we can do that."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"The sand storm comes on very suddenly, and traveling very swiftly, veers in its course, so no matter what direction you choose, it would be all luck and chance in dodging it."

"Indeed!"

"It is true."

"Well," said Frank, with a light laugh, "we won't borrow any trouble. We will wait until we reach the bridge before we cross it."

The Explorer now returned to its course and ran on swiftly.

The hours passed.

The sun had passed the meridian, and was on its downward course. The heat was intense.

It seemed literally stifling in its intensity. All were glad to sit under an awning forward and cajole a breeze with prodigious fans.

"What?" exclaimed Prof. Alwise. "If it is hotter than this in Hades, I hope I may escape it!"

"I certainly hope you will, professor," laughed Frank. "I don't intend to get there if I can help it."

"Golly! I amn't so suah 'bout dat I'ishman," said Pomp, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"Don't yez give up worrying about yezself," spluttered Barney, indignantly. "I'll take me chances wid yez any time!"

"I reckon dat yo' wud git left."

"Begorra, av I did, divil a bit av help I'd axe from the loikes of yez!"

"Sb, don't get embroiled this hot day!" cried Frank, reprovingly, "that would be foolish!"

The two irrepressible jokers quieted down, and presently Pomp went below to prepare a cool supper.

A dull misty haze had seemed to appear on the horizon. At least it seemed like mist, and it rose in a mighty wall just ahead. This was noted by the travelers, and Frank exclaimed:

"Mercy on us, I hope that is not a sand storm!"

"Indeed it looks like it."

Alarm seized the voyagers.

Frank sprang to the wheel and stood ready to change the course of the machine.

But even as they gazed, the wall of mist seemed to roll away as by magic, and a scene too beautiful for adequate description burst upon the astonished view of the party.

There were green slopes and beautiful valleys. A city with walls of white shone resplendent beyond.

Shepherds tended their flocks upon the sunny slopes, and a dull, soft atmosphere was over all.

It was like a glimpse of paradise, and the travelers gazed upon it spellbound for some while before a true conviction of its meaning dawned upon them.

Then the cry burst unanimously from their lips:

"The mirage!"

It was indeed the famed mirage of the Great Desert.

That wondrous spectacle which many a poor wretch, dying of the pangs of heat, hunger and thirst, had found so tantalizingly before his vision.

Beyond conception it hung there before his gaze, while the Explorer ran straight on toward it.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEADLY SIMOON.

A VERITABLE land of promise the mirage seemed. All gazed at it in wonderment and admiration.

"Is it not beautiful?" cried Prof. Alwise, enthusiastically. "If Paradise is really as beautiful as that, I shall be indeed well satisfied to go there."

"Begorra, I can't make up me moind that it ain't real!" cried Barney.

But even as they gazed a part of the vision began to fade; then a sudden swift thought struck the professor.

"Frank!" he cried, excitedly.

"Well?"

"I have heard it said that the most terrible simoons are always preceded by a mirage. Do you believe this is a warning?"

Frank and the professor exchanged glances. The young inventor stepped into the pilot-house.

There hung the huge barometer, and Frank consulted it not without apprehension.

As he turned to the professor the expression upon his face was a disturbed one.

"The indications are that we are to have a heavy storm!" declared Frank.

The professor shrugged his shoulders.

"I think we had better change our course at once!" he declared. "Cannot we find some sheltering oasis hereabouts?"

But only the mirage, now fast fading, bore any resemblance to such a thing.

Frank did change the course of the Explorer, to that quarter in which he felt sure safety would be found.

Now that the mirage had faded the air was singularly dead and stifling.

Indeed it was difficult breathing for all on the deck.

Frank was firmly convinced that the simoon was close at hand.

Already he fancied he felt its withering hot touch upon his cheek. If all remained on deck the chances were they would be stifled.

So Frank cried:

"Come into the cabin every one. Close every window and door!"

Barney and Pomp hastened to obey.

Frank's theory was to meet the storm by remaining in the cabin until the poisonous blast had passed.

He believed that there would be sufficient air to last in the cabin until the storm should pass. It was necessary to make the cabin as tight as possible to avoid the outside pressure from displacing the air in the cabin and suffocating those in it.

Soon it became certain that the simoon was coming.

In the far east a mighty yellow wave seemed to be rolling resistlessly down toward the Explorer.

Frank turned the machine about so that it was head on to the storm.

Then all waited its coming.

They had not long to wait. Like a fearful cloud it swooped down over the desert.

The first shock seemed to fairly lift the Explorer and threatened to overturn it.

But sand swept about its running gear and speedily anchored it. As it was, however, the flag mast above the dome snapped like a pipe stem.

Then what followed was ever after to the travelers like a dream.

It seemed as if all the furies stormed about the machine.

Part of the time the air was as black as Erebus, and one could see nothing a yard away.

The atmosphere in the machine went up to stifling heat. Prof. Alwise forgetting himself made a move to open a window.

But Frank clutched his wrist.

"No, no!" he cried, "that will never do. You must not!"

"But we shall stifle."

"Ah, but there is no air outside. It is a furnace."

"True, I had forgotten."

All cast themselves upon their stomachs on the floor of the machine trying to get cool air in that fashion.

Their eyes bulged, perspiration was wrung from every pore, and their tongues seemed to be drying in a horrible manner. Death was close upon them.

But a few minutes more and they would have succumbed. In that few minutes the storm passed.

The simoon passes away as suddenly as it comes.

It is fortunate for the desert traveler that this is so.

Instinctively the camel buries his nose in the sand at its approach. The Arab wraps himself in his shawl and covers his face, lying flat on the ground and praying to Mahomet.

If he can manage to breathe the necessary length of time, and the sand does not bury him too deep, his life is spared.

But there are many chances against his success in this.

Often whole caravans fail to outlast the furnace-like blast, and succumb to its fury.

Leaving their bones to bleach and burn in the desert, as a horrible warning to all travelers.

Frank was the first to recover.

He scrambled to his feet and rushed to a window, flinging it open.

Into the cabin rushed a draught of cooling air.

It was an intoxicating relief to the stricken men. All crept to the window and drank it in.

"My God, that was a close call!" declared the professor.

"A little more and we would have been gone!" declared Frank.

"You are right!"

"We can now truly appreciate the advantages of pure air."

"It is sweeter than nectar!"

It is a merciful peculiarity of the simoon that it is always followed by a cooling wind.

It is as if all the heat of the region had become concentrated in that one fearful blast of stifling air, leaving only the cool behind.

The travelers hung by the window for some time drinking in the cool air.

Then Barney recovered strength enough to rise over the sill and look out.

As he did so an excited cry escaped his lips.

"Bejabers, wud yez luk at the loikes av that!" he cried. "Shure it's buried we are!"

"Buried!" exclaimed Frank.

"Yis, sor."

Frank rose and for the first time looked out of the window. What he beheld was an astounding sight.

The plain seemed to extend away as far as the eye could reach upon a dead level with the window.

Miles of level sand in every direction, and the lower part of the machine was buried in it completely.

It was an astounding and dismaying situation.

The travelers climbed out of the window and looked about them.

The machine was fully four feet beneath the level of the desert. The wind storm had thus changed the level of this section completely.

A more astonishing metamorphosis could hardly be imagined.

Moreover, it was by no means a pleasing thing to contemplate.

How to extricate the Explorer from its sandy bed was a perplexing question.

Frank walked about on the shifting sands for some moments in perplexity.

The sand storm was a whirling cloud upon the horizon now. It had passed on with great swiftness.

"Well, we're badly stuck, are we not?" cried Prof. Alwise. "How can we ever get out of this scrape, Frank?"

"It is not going to be easy," admitted the young inventor. "Really, I can see but one way."

"And that—"

"Is to dig our way out!"

"It will take a good while!"

"Yet it must be done."

Barney and Pomp looked questioningly at Frank.

"Say de wo'd, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp.

"I'm ready, sor!" averred Barney.

"Then get at it," cried Frank, "the sooner it is done the better. It may be days before we can get the running gear in order again."

"Well, during the delay I will interest myself studying the phenomena of the region," declared the professor.

"You will have plenty of leisure," said Frank, "I can promise you. However, I wish you luck."

But a cloud crossed the professor's face.

"Ah!" he exclaimed.

"What is the matter?"

"Suppose the Arabs should come upon us now!"

It was a dismaying reflection. But Frank had considered it already.

"Well," he said. "We would have to make the best of it."

Even as they spoke both instinctively turned and glanced across the desert.

Frank knew well that generally a horde of Arabs followed in the path of every storm of the kind, looking for plunder from wrecked caravans or travelers overtaken by the storm.

And sure enough upon the distant horizon there was seen a dark moving line.

"The Arabs!" gasped Frank.

"It is true!"

"Begorra, we niver kin dig the machine out in toime," cried Barney.

Frank turned a trifle pale.

"What is to be done?" gasped the scientist.

"There is but one thing," said Frank, with sudden force.

"What?"

"Prepare to defend our lives. Back into the cabin. Bring up every weapon and necessary ammunition. We must prepare for a hard fight."

Every one in the party felt and appreciated the weight of Frank's words.

There was no doubt but that they were in for a battle with the Arabs. Whether of Bel Ashan's tribe or not it was not easy to say.

Barney and Pomp rushed below and brought up rifles and cartridges. Then every window was closed with bullet proof screens, and the loopholes were opened.

Every possible precaution was taken to guard against an effective attack.

Then the defenders of the anchored machine waited for the enemy.

They had not over long to wait.

Every moment the troop of Arab horsemen became better visible on the horizon. Nearer they drew.

Soon they were not a half mile distant. At their head rode a fierce-looking Sheikh with flowing gray beard.

They had sighted the machine and were bearing down for it.

Not until within two hundred yards of the machine did they halt. Then they sat there upon their horses regarding the buried machine for some time in apparently silent astonishment.

"Well, they are taking a good look at us," said Frank.

"Perhaps they are inclined to be friendly," said Prof. Alwise. "If so, I shall be very glad, for warfare will be averted."

CHAPTER VI.

RESCUED FROM BONDAGE.

But Frank smiled at this notion of the scientist.

"Don't deceive yourself with any such idea as that!" he exclaimed.

"Then you don't believe it?"

"Certainly not."

"But why should it seem so very unreasonable?"

"I don't see how you can hardly ask that question. The Mahometan is a natural enemy of the Christian, and anywhere and under any circumstances like the present they will strike him down!"

Frank's prediction was verified.

Suddenly one of the Arabs rode forward with hand up in token of a parley. Frank appeared at a window.

The Arab halted his steed not twenty yards away, and at sight of Frank addressed him in Arabic.

Frank shook his head to indicate that he did not understand.

Whereat the fellow next spoke in the Turkish language. But Frank now spoke in French.

"Do you talk French?" he asked.

The fellow's face lit up.

"Yes," he replied.

"Then proceed. What is your wish?"

"We are men from the tribe of Mahmond Bey. What do you in the desert?"

"We are searching for the underground city," replied Frank.

"Leave us to our own device."

The Arab spokesman gave a violent start. He regarded Frank keenly.

"You are not French?" he asked.

"No—we are Americans."

"Ah! I have heard of your people, Effendi. What sort of a chariot is that in which you are?"

"It is one which is deadly to the touch of any but its occupants," replied Frank.

The Arab looked incredulous.

"I will report to the good sheik," he said, "and then you will let us come into your chariot?"

"No!" replied Frank decidedly. "I only ask that you go on and leave us. We do not want to make a near acquaintance with anybody. Go on and leave us."

"I will carry your request to the sheik. I will return."

The fellow wheeled his horse and rode away toward the waiting band.

An excited discussion evidently took place there; then the horseman was seen returning.

Frank once more appeared at the window of the Explorer.

"Well," he asked, as the truce bearer reined in his horse, "what will you have?"

"My master, the Sheik El Mahmond sends greeting and a message. If the Americans will pay a tribute of fifty thousand piasters they may be left alone and safe."

Frank laughed scornfully.

"Not a piaster?" he replied. "Go back and tell your master that."

The fellow's eyes gleamed; he drew his keen scimeter and flourished the blade.

"Then every dog of you shall die in the name of Mahomet!"

"I warn you not to attack us!" cried Frank. "We are not to be trifled with, I assure you. Go back to your master and tell him that I will blow him into perdition if he dares attack me!"

The fellow uttered an Arabic curse. Then he wheeled his horse and rode away.

The message sent by Frank evidently did not please the Arabs, for they gave way to a chorus of angry yells.

Then they deployed in a semi-circle and fired a volley at the machine.

The bullets rattled sharply against the metal shield of the explorer. No damage was done.

"Steady!" said Frank, coolly. "Each pick his man and make every shot tell."

This command was heeded.

The defenders of the Explorer fired, and three saddles were emptied. It was a surprise to the Arabs.

But they uttered mad yells, and now started for the machine like a whirlwind.

"Steady!" cried Frank, again.

As fast as the defenders could load and fire they did so. Man after man dropped from his saddle.

Within four or five feet of the Explorer the Arabs rode. Wheeling their horses and making savage blows at the windows with their swords as they passed.

But the steel screws withstood the terrific blows. The assailants could not hack their way into the machine.

After a fierce fight and ineffectual attempt to break into the machine, they rode away out of range to consider a new course of action.

"Hurrah!" shouted Prof. Alwise. "We have got the best of them!"

"Begorra, it's whipped they are!" shouted Barney.

"Golly! we've jes' too many fo' de rapscallions!" cried Pomp.

But Frank looked grave.

"The worst is to come," he said. "They will attack us more successfully by night. Moreover, they may lay siege and starve us out."

"Yez are roight," said Barney, ruefully. "Niver moind, if we can only keep thim out av range we can be ather digging the machine out just the same."

This looked reasonable and cheered the spirits of all.

But at this moment a new and unlooked for incident occurred.

Pomp chanced to glance out of the window, and an exclamation escaped his lips.

"Golly, Marse Frank, wha' am dat?"

Frank was quickly by his side.

He saw the cause of the darky's exclamation at once.

About, on the sands, were strewn the bodies of the Arabs, stricken down by the bullets of the Americans.

But one of these, seemingly not so badly wounded as the others, had crept almost up to the window.

His handsome bronzed face was not that of an Arab, and his blue eyes shone with an eager light, as he cried in unmistakable English: "Mercy, good friends! I am one of you. Take me in for the love of God! It is my one hope of escape from a life of dreadful exile and bondage!"

"Great heavens!" gasped Frank, "who are you?"

"Ask me not now. I am one of your countrymen."

"An American?"

"Yez yes! Oh, for mercy's sake take me in before they return to the attack, or they will kill me!"

Frank instantly threw open the window. The next moment the pleader for mercy sprung into the cabin.

"Thank God!" he cried, as he stood erect and handsome. "I am saved! Once more among my countrymen!"

An astonished cry escaped the lips of the Explorer's party.

"Why—he is really one of our own people," cried Prof. Alwise.

"Yes," cried the rescued man. "I am one of you. Do not fear treachery. My story is simple. For years I have been in bondage among those Arabs. Cruel is the treatment I have received, but this is the trick by which I have escaped them!"

"But you are wounded—"

"No, not a scratch. The tumble from my horse was intentional, and my action feigned. It was a ruse to escape them!"

"Well done!" cried Frank, heartily. "Well, my man, you are welcome. But you shall tell us your story."

"That I will," cried the handsome young fellow, cheerily, "but it is a long story and suppose we wait until later when we shall be less occupied. The Arabs may return to the attack at any moment."

"You should know them well!"

"I ought to. I have been four years among them."

"The Shiek Mahmond—what sort of a man is he?"

"A murderous wretch I can assure you. He is not to be trusted."

"Like all of his nationality."

"Exactly."

"You think he will try his best to overcome us?"

"I do."

"What will he do if he fails to break a way in here?"

The young American shrugged his shoulders.

"He averred an intention of besieging you, but—"

"What?"

"His success will all depend upon how much water you have aboard as well as eatables."

"We have enough for two weeks," replied Frank.

"Oh, well, then you are all right. His supply of water will be exhausted in two days. He will be entirely out then, and you know it is a day's hard ride to the Oasis of Kodan, and in the desert without water is equivalent to death."

All had listened to this statement with deepest interest.

The words of the young bondman of the Arabs made a deep impression.

"Then you think we have rather the best of it?" asked Frank.

"I certainly do."

"That gives us courage."

"But you must repel every attack made by them."

"I think we can do that."

"Well," and the young man's eyes flashed, "I am with you and ready to sell my life in the battle."

"Indeed we are fortunate," cried Frank. "You are so well versed in desert life that you can help us greatly."

"Indeed I will," cried the youth; "but—may I ask what your mission here is?"

"To find the underground city."

"Then you have hit upon the right man, for I can lead you to it."

A joyful cry burst from all.

"You can?"

"I ought to be able to; I lived there for two years."

"You lived there?"

"Yes, as the slave of that cruel sheik Bel Ashan; he is worse than a demon! Oh, I can tell you all about it!"

"Tell us now," cried Prof. Alwise, eagerly. "What sort of a city is it?"

"Simply the ruins of a once very large and powerful town. There are monstrous palaces with mighty columns and broad halls. Over all is a depth of sand in some places fifty feet deep.

"But there are passages dug from one building to another and shafts to let in air and light. There is one vast opening like a cavern by which you enter the main court of the largest palace. From there you may penetrate for miles under the desert. The sand did not fill up the buildings, but the streets, and as these were in many cases arched over, the wonderful city yet exists under the Sahara as perfect as the day it was built, and that must have been full a thousand years ago."

The travelers listened to this wonderful description with mouths agape. Then Frank asked:

"Are there any other tribes occupying this wonderful city but Bel Ashan's?"

"No!" was the youth's reply. "And he occupies the city only at certain times when he brings plunder to the place to divide with his lawless crew."

CHAPTER VII.

THE OASIS OF KODAN.

But as he finished this speech the young bondman turned and looked about him curiously.

"But what sort of vehicle is this?" he asked. "I have never seen or heard of its like. Its wheels are buried in the sand, are they?"

"Yes," replied Frank. "This is a machine of my own invention, and I call it the Desert Explorer."

"It is very wonderful! But how will you propel it now that your horses are buried?"

"Horses!"

"Or camels, were they? I suppose the simoon killed them, as I do not see them about."

The youth spoke with such sincerity that his listeners laughed.

"You are in error, sir," Frank said. "This machine is not propelled by horses, or even camels."

The youth looked wonder struck.

"You surely do not do it yourself."

"Oh, no, it is done by electricity."

"Electricity?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" exclaimed the young bondman, vaguely, "I remember now that there was much talk before I left America five years ago of the power of electricity. Is it possible that it has become such a science?"

"You shall see," said Frank. "Come with me."

As the Bedouins did not seem inclined to attack at once, Frank was enabled to take the young man over the machine and illustrate to him its workings.

He was wonderstruck and charmed with what he saw.

His enthusiasm was great.

"I will be glad to stay by you," he cried. "We will dig the Explorer out speedily. I have a double motive for visiting again the underground city, and that is to rescue my sister."

"Your sister!" exclaimed Frank in amazement.

"Yes."

"Have you a sister in captivity?"

"Yes, she is in the hands of that fiend, Bel Ashan. Next month she is sixteen years old, and then he proposes to put her in his harem."

"The wretch!" exclaimed Frank, in horror. "But—tell me your name, young man."

"It is Harold Barcombe."

"The same!" cried Frank, excitedly. "Is not your father Edgar Barcombe, of New York City?"

"He is!" said Harold, in astonishment. "Do you know him?"

"Well indeed. To find you and your sister is one of the objects of this trip across the Sahara."

Harold was so amazed and overcome that for a moment he could not speak.

Then he fairly embraced Frank, asking him all manner of questions about his father and many other things.

But the conversation could not be continued long, for the crack of rifles were heard from above.

"The Arabs have come to the second attack," cried Frank. "Let us repulse them."

"That we will do!" cried Harold, seizing a rifle.

They sprang to the upper deck, where Barney and Pomp and Prof. Alwise were drawing a bead on the advancing Arabs.

This time the foe were advancing to the attack from a point directly in front of the machine.

This brought them within range of the dynamite gun which was just above the line of sand.

Frank chuckled and said:

"I'll fix them this time!"

He went forward and opened the breech of the gun.

Placing a projectile in it, he made the dynamo connections and then sighted the gun.

He aimed for a hummock of sand behind which the Arabs were crouched; then he pressed the electric key.

There was a hissing recoil and a sharp "ping" and the projectile leaped from the muzzle of the gun.

Straight as an arrow to the mark it went. It struck the hummock of sand full and fair.

The Bedouins had left their horses behind and had advanced to the attack on foot.

When the projectile struck the sand heap for a few moments nothing could be seen of the wretches.

The air was filled for a hundred feet in height with a cloud of sand. It rose in a mighty pillar and carried up with it the remains of fully a dozen of the Arabs.

When the sand settled down again, there was a yawning cavity where the hummock had been, and the remainder of the Bedouins were fleeing for their lives.

The way they cut for their horses would have done credit to monkeys.

With a wild cheer, the defenders of the Explorer sent a volley of rifle balls after them.

The Bedouins sprang to saddle and hastily rode out of range.

"That was a settler for them!" cried Harold, "they won't come again."

And his words proved true.

The Bedouins did not come again. They evidently had had enough of the fun.

They galloped in a circle about the machine carefully keeping out of range. Then they held a conference.

The travelers watched them closely.

"Can you tell what they will do, Harold?" asked Frank.

"I think I can!" replied the young American, slowly. "They will now ride to the Oasis of Kodan; then they will go to Bel Ashan for reinforcements and supplies. They will return in four days, and if the Explorer is not liberated then, they will besiege us."

Frank was convinced that Harold had hit upon the truth.

"I believe you are right!" he cried. "Get shovels, everybody!"

No further bidding was necessary. All stripped off their superfluous clothing and went to shoveling sand.

They progressed very rapidly at this.

In a few hours they had entirely cleared the running gear and wheels. But it was necessary to dig a gradually ascending slope for the machine to run up to the level of the plain.

It was the middle of the next day before this was accomplished. Then the machine was ready to emerge from its enforced confinement.

But when it came to making the machinery work it was a failure. So much fine dust had settled there that it was completely clogged. There was nothing to do but to clean it out thoroughly.

This proved a long and laborious task. Barney and Pomp were obliged to keep at work another whole day.

Various parts of the machinery had to be removed and effectually cleaned and oiled. But at length all was announced in perfect shape.

Then Frank pressed the lever, and the dynamos began to work. The machinery started with a buzz.

The Explorer ran quickly out of the trench. Once more it was on the level plain.

All sprung aboard, cheers were given, then Barney went to the key board, and the Explorer shot forward.

"Where now?" asked Prof. Alwise.

"Is not this Oasis of Kodan the way to the underground city?" asked Frank, of Harold.

"It is."

"Let us go thither then."

Harold went in and set the direct and correct course for Barney. Then all repaired to the upper deck to enjoy a breeze which just fanned the hot air currents of the desert.

The machine ran on rapidly mile after mile.

Nothing was seen of the Bedouins, but a worse danger was sighted. Suddenly Prof. Alwise sprang up, crying:

"Look! a waterspout!"

It was not a waterspout which was coming whirling over the horizon, but one of sand.

They are common in the desert, and are capable of raising tons of sand into higher air currents.

Woe to the traveler or caravan that comes in contact with one of these revolving terrors.

If too heavy to be lifted into the clouds the object breaks the spout and is at once buried in sand.

"A sand-spout!" cried Herald. "Look out for it. It is coming our way."

This was true.

But Frank Reade, Jr., understood exactly how to meet it, and he did not hesitate a moment.

He rushed forward to the electric gun and drew a bead upon the revolving column.

It was half a mile distant, but advancing with fearful velocity. There was no time to lose.

It would cover the intervening distance very quickly. Frank pressed the electric key.

There was a recoil and the next moment the projectile struck the sand column.

The exhibition was one beyond description. A terrific cannon like report followed. The air seemed filled with sand.

Some of it even reached the decks of the Explorer.

Then the tons of sand fell with a crash like thunder upon the desert floor.

A fearful cloud of dust hovered in the air for a time and then settled slowly and the horizon was again clear.

Another peril had been met and overcome.

All drew a deep breath of relief.

The machine now went booming on its way toward the oasis of Kodan.

But they were unable to make it that night. Camp was made once more in mid-desert.

The next morning at sunrise the Explorer was again on its way.

And shortly before noon a dark speck was sighted against the white sands.

"It is the oasis," declared Harold.

All now eagerly watched the sighted spot. Soon they were near enough to see waving palms.

It was a little islet in the mighty sea of sand and, truly, it was good for the aching eyes of the travelers to gaze upon that distant bit of green.

But as they drew nearer an astounding spectacle was witnessed.

A long caravan had drawn up at the oasis. There was a vast concourse of men, horses and camels.

But also above the crowd there arose smoke and the distant rattle of firearms was heard.

A battle was in progress.

What did it mean?

All exchanged glances, but Harold relieved their doubts by saying: "The Bedouins have attacked the caravan. It is the same old story; they mean to plunder it!"

Frank's cheeks burned.

"Not if I know it!" he cried, excitedly. "Put on all speed, Barney!"

CHAPTER VIII.

RESCUING THE CARAVAN.

FRANK READE, JR., meant to go to the relief of the caravan.

It was against his nature to see it plundered by the thieving Bedouins. He set his lips tightly.

"I'll give them a good drubbing this time," he muttered. "I'll exterminate the whole poisonous gang!"

Down toward the scene of battle the Explorer boomed.

It could be seen that the Bedouins fully a thousand strong were smiting the caravan defenders hard.

Already they had run off many of the richest laden camels.

But the Explorer went booming down to close range. The travelers opened fire with their rifles.

But this fire was not strong enough to drive the Bedouins back. They paid no heed whatever to the machine.

Frank saw that extreme measures must be taken.

So he brought the machine into line with the rear of the Bedouins and trained the electric gun upon them.

Frank was always averse to human slaughter. But in the present case it seemed to be extremely necessary.

Those in the caravan were being cut down like sheep. Men, women and children were being butchered by the wretches in their fury.

Frank trained the gun and sent a projectile into the midst of the Bedouins.

The result was fearful.

They fell in heaps, and as projectile after projectile plowed through their ranks they were obliged to break and flee.

In their retreat they were extremely disorderly and terrified.

The white-haired old Sheik Mahmoud could be seen vainly endeavoring to rally them.

They could not be brought to face the deadly dynamite gun, and were thoroughly routed.

The caravan was saved and its handful of defenders were as astonished as if they had been rewarded with a visitation from another sphere.

They regarded the Explorer and the deadly dynamite gun with sheer amazement.

After the force of robbers was dispelled, however, one of their number—a white-bearded, patriarchal man, mounted on a cream white horse, rode up.

He bowed gravely, and addressed Frank, who was at the dasher in Arabic.

Frank answered in French.

"I speak French," he said, "but I am an American."

The face of the old man lit up.

"Ah, I have heard of your wonderful people—the most wonderful in the world! In the name of Mahomet I greet thee!"

"Allow me to reciprocate," said Frank, politely. "Whom have I the honor of addressing—the owner of the caravan?"

"I am Ali Shir, merchant of Cairo. I trade in Tunis and Algiers, and cross the desert three times a year. We have heretofore beaten the robbers off, but this time they would surely have slaughtered us but for your timely aid."

"I am glad to have been able to render it," said Frank. "These fellows are the curse of the desert."

"So indeed they are, noble Effendi. But pray dismount from your wonderful chariot and partake of some good Damascus wine with me."

Frank declined this most polite of invitations with thanks.

The caravan was left to recover from its experience, and the machine ran to another part of the oasis.

Here water was taken on, and then a course was set for the underground city.

But just as they were about to start the clatter of hoofs was heard, and a horseman came dashing up.

It was Ali Shir, the rich merchant.

His manner was eager, as he cried:

"Dear friends, I would beg you to return and partake of our hospitality. I can assure, Ali Shir is a man of honor, and you shall be treated as princes should!"

"My good sir," replied Frank, warmly, "we would be very glad to accept your over kind invitation. But our time is very valuable and we must hasten away to fulfill an important mission."

"Then if you come to Cairo ask in the bazaars for Ali Shir."

"We will do so."

"But this mission of yours—can we not help you?"

"No, I think not. We are seeking the Underground City—"

"Ah, Effendi, may Mahomet bless you! If you find it and punish well that robber Bel Ashan, the sultan will pay thee a prince's fortune."

"We hope to do so!" said Frank. "And now, noble sir, farewell."

Ali Shir prostrated himself on his horse's neck. Frank lifted his cap and the machine glided away from the Oasis of Kodan.

A short while later it was again booming along over the sandy plain.

The objective point now was the underground city.

It was expected to reach it in a few days, though it was well upon the lower verge of the desert.

Quick time was made, however.

The Explorer on good, level, hard ground could have easily made a speed of forty miles per hour.

But over the shifting sands she was doing well to average twenty.

This, however, was done.

On ran the machine at good speed. Finally early one morning Harold Barcombe cried:

"There is the city!"

A single short pillar of stone rose out of the sand. This was all.

"The city!" exclaimed Prof. Alwise. "really it looks little like such on the surface!"

This was true. But Harold said:

"The city is even under us now. Its extent will not disappoint you when, once you can enter it. That single pillar is the only mark above ground."

"Even that shows good architecture!" said the Professor scanning it with his glass. "It is a Doric column."

Every moment the Explorer drew nearer to the city now.

Harold indicated a depression in the ground and said:

"There is the largest and best entrance that I know of to Dechan, the buried city of Sahara."

"Then we will enter by it!" declared Frank. "Can the machine find entrance?"

"I think so!"

Down into the depression the Explorer ran. There was a mighty cave like opening in the sand.

And into this the machine ran. The next moment the explorers gave exclamations of wonderment.

They were in a mighty high arched structure, a veritable peristyle at one end, with pillars of the most exquisite architecture.

The floor was of finely polished stone, and every indication showed that this had once been the palace of kings.

There was a light of triumph in Harold Barcombe's eyes.

"What did I tell you?" he cried. "Is it not fine?"

"Grand!" exclaimed Prof. Alwise. "Oh, here is full scope for the archaeologist!"

The machine rolled slowly on among the mighty pillars and over the stone floor. The professor had been studying the architecture for awhile, and now Frank asked him:

"Well, Alwise, what do you think of it?"

"I have just hit upon what I believe to be a solution."

"Ah!"

"This may be one of the famous palaces of the Queen of Sheba. The renaissance is of that period."

"It can't be King Solomon's famed temple."

"Oh, no, but it is in that part of the world from which the Queen of Sheba is vaguely supposed to have come."

"Good enough! Perhaps we may find something yet to substantiate that idea."

"Ah, I fear not. These robbers have doubtless destroyed or carried off any records or portable things."

"They are the curse of Egypt and the East," said Harold Barcombe.

"That is well said."

"But bejabs I don't see none av them hereabouts!" cried Barney. "Shure av they live here we ought to find them."

"We have not yet penetrated deep enough," declared Harold. "Let me now direct your course."

He went into the pilot house with Barney. The search-light was now employed.

All dark passages were made light as day, and thus the machine went slowly on feeling its way.

Nothing as yet had been seen of the Bedouins.

From one stately paved court to another the machine passed. So high arched and spacious were the buildings that the Explorer could go anywhere.

But finally they came to a passage too narrow for it to pass.

This would have been abandoned but for an incident. The keen eyes of Harold Barcombe caught sight of a light far down the passage.

"There," he cried, "there is the entrance to the stronghold of Bel Ashan. It is there that I shall find my sister!"

All was excitement at this announcement. Every one was disappointed that the machine could not invade the stronghold.

But it could not do so, so the project was dropped.

But in some manner the place must be invaded and the Bedouins given battle. Harold was the first to hit upon a plan.

"I would suggest a sally being made," he declared, "perhaps we could manage to creep in there and rescue Edith in some way!"

"Perhaps we could," agreed Prof. Alwise.

Frank readily agreed.

"You know the ropes better than any of us, Harold," he declared, "you shall lead the way."

The young American readily agreed to this.

It was arranged that Frank and Barney were to accompany him. Pomp and the professor would remain aboard the Explorer.

Frank had a long piece of fine wire which was wound upon a spool. With this and a telegraph sounder he expected to easily communicate with those aboard the Explorer.

But before the party could leave the machine a strange thing happened.

A warning cry came from Pomp.

"Look out dar, Marse Frank; de debbls am comin' fo' sho!"

The "debbls" were certainly coming. The clatter of horses' hoofs were plainly heard. Then into view rode a cavalcade of horsemen.

They were Bedouins and bound into the passage, at whose mouth the machine now stood.

They drew rein and gazed in amazement at the strange sight. The machine and its presence there was a curious thing to them.

Moreover, it blocked their further passage. It was a moment of most exciting and precarious kind.

CHAPTER IX.

BEL ASHAN'S ESCAPE.

As the Bedouins sat there like statues upon their sleek horses, they formed a picturesque spectacle.

They were also a good and easy mark, and Barney might have fired upon them but Frank restrained him.

"Not yet," he said. "It is not time."

But Harold Barcombe, who had been scanning them closely, exclaimed:

"It is Bel Ashan himself!"

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Frank.

"It is the truth."

"This is luck. We must capture him," declared the young inventor.

"How?" queried the young American with incredulity.

"You shall see!"

Frank went to one of the forward windows. He held a long coil of wire in his hand.

This he made a noose of and flung it across the passage. It caught and held upon a jagged bit of rock.

Paying out enough slack wire, Frank first connected the other end with the dynamo in the engine room. The wire thus charged to a tremendous extent was about high enough to reach the breast of any one of the horsemen.

Then Frank went into the pilot house and ran the machine back from the mouth of the passage.

This left it clear and was a plain invitation to the Bedouins to dash by the machine and escape.

"They will get by us!" cried Harold. "Is that safe, Mr. Reade?"

"Keep cool!" said Frank, steadily. "I know what I am about!"

Matters worked just as Frank thought they would. One of the Bedouins came forward for a parley, his horse prouetting gaily.

When a few yards from the machine Frank opened the pilot house window and cried in French:

"Ah, is it you, Bel Ashan?"

"Aye, Effendi," replied the great Sheikh, in a cynical tone. "So you have decided to beard me in my den!"

"Your life and the safety of your band of cut-throats will depend upon how quickly you decide to deliver up to us the young girl in your power!" said Frank, sternly.

"Ah, that will never be!" said Bel Ashan, with a grating laugh. "She is mine, and with all your power you cannot take her from me."

"We shall see!"

"This is the retreat of Bel Ashan, and you can never drive him from it."

Before Frank could say more, just what he had expected, and indeed, hoped for, came to pass.

The wily sheik suddenly gave his horse spur and attempted to flash by the machine and into the passage.

He was partly successful.

He would have escaped any bullet sent after him, but the wire which Frank had stretched across the passage struck him just breast high.

That settled the argument.

Wily Bel Ashan received the force of the electric shock.

It was not harsh enough to kill him, but sufficient to stun him.

Horse and rider went down in a heap.

Then Frank cried:

"Fire! Fire upon them!"

Instantly a volley was given the Bedouins.

So fierce was the volley given them that they were not able to come to the aid of their chief.

They beat an incontinent retreat leaving several of their dead upon the floor of the temple.

Then Barney and Pomp opened the door and sprang down the gang ladder.

In a jiffy they had the sheik bound, and were carrying him aboard the Explorer.

He had just begun to revive, and when he fully regained his senses he was in the cabin of the Explorer.

His foes were all about him, and a more astonished or dismayed villain was never seen.

"Well, my fine fellow!" cried Frank, with a hearty laugh, "this is a bit of a surprise party to you, eh?"

He muttered an Arabic curse.

"How did I come here? I never knew Elim to stumble before. A malediction on his tripping feet!"

All laughed at his crusty manner.

"Now," said Frank, sternly, "if you value your life you will agree to my terms!"

Bel Ashan looked sullenly up.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "What are they, noble Effendi?"

"Deliver up to us the girl now held captive by you! We will give you your life and you may safely depart. If not—you shall die!"

Bel Ashan's grim face only hardened, and he said:

"Effendi asks too much, that I can never do. I have sworn by the beard of my fathers, and made a sacred vow to Mahomet that she shall be the pearl of my harem. It must be so!"

"We will see!" said Frank, coolly. "I give you one more chance!"

But Bel Ashan did not relax.

"I will pay a ransom!" he declared. "Ten thousand piastres are yours."

"Money will not do," replied Frank. "The release of the girl, or nothing!"

"Never!"

"That settles it!"

Frank turned to Barney.

"Pull off his sandals!" he said.

The Celt obeyed, and the sheik's feet were bared. Then Frank brought forward the same wire which had stricken Bel Ashan from his horse.

It was but a moment's work to make a coil of it and apply it to the bottom of the sheik's feet.

For a few moments the gritty Arab stood the infliction well.

Then his muscles began to grow taut and his veins to swell; great drops of perspiration oozed from every pore.

The agony was intense, and a thrilling cry burst from his lips.

Frank withdrew the torture.

"Will you come to terms now?" he asked.

The sheik for a moment could not speak; then he finally articulated:

"I will pay any ransom. Name your price, Effendi."

"Only the release of the girl will do."

Again the sheik's brow darkened.

"Never!" he gritted.

Again Frank applied the current. Again the Arab's form straightened; the agony was most intense.

What would have been the outcome it is hard to say. It is possible that this trial would have brought the rascal to terms.

But at that moment there arose an uproar outside.

Warning cries came from Barney and Pomp.

"Dey am comin', Marse Frank! Cl'ar de track! We'se gwine to hab a fight dis time."

Frank and Harold seized their rifles and sprang to the loopholes.

It was true that the Bedouins were coming to the attack again.

The place fairly swarmed with them.

Bullets rattled against the Explorer like hail.

"Give it to them!" cried Frank. "Don't let them come to close quarters."

The defenders of the machine were not slow to comply with this order; bullets flew thick and fast.

But the Bedouins swarmed about the Explorer like hornets. Frank saw that the situation was getting perilous.

A whole gang were coming with axes. Should they succeed in coming to close quarters, no doubt they would succeed in doing much damage.

Frank at once adopted a measure to guard against this contingency.

He sprang into the pilot-house and started the machine ahead.

There was not an abundance of room in the place, but Frank ran the machine ahead several hundred feet and then brought the dynamite gun to bear upon the attacking horde.

He had refrained from using this heretofore for fear that the concussion might engulf all about.

But it had now assumed a serious aspect, and it was plainly necessary that extreme measures should be taken.

So he did not hesitate to fire the electric gun.

The projectile exploded with stunning force. Dozens of the Bedouins were killed, and a part of the roof collapsed and great quantities of sand rushed down into the place.

This for a moment threw the foe into inextricable confusion. Frank did not fire again for he disliked the idea of such general slaughter.

But he saw the way clear now toward the passage which led into the stronghold of the Bedouins.

Had the machine been able to pass through it, Frank would certainly have accepted the chance.

But it was not, and yet another idea occurred to him.

Pressing the lever he ran the Explorer forward until it fairly blocked the mouth of the passage. Then he said to Barney and Pomp:

"Now, if you care to accept the risk I think there is a good chance to invade the den of the Bedouins and perhaps rescue Edith Barcombe. I can hold the wretches at bay here with the electric gun. I think all their fighting men are out here!"

"Let me be one of that party!" cried Harold Barcombe.

"Well, suppose you and Barney go then!"

"We will do it!"

But before this move could be executed a thrilling thing occurred. A great cry came from Pomp and also the sounds of a scuffle.

"Hi, hi, dar!" yelled the darky, "don' yo' flink yo' kin wo'k dat game. Massy Lordy, he am done it fo' suah!"

All rushed below in amazement just in time to witness a thrilling sight.

The sheik Bel Ashan had remained in his uncomfortable position on the deck while the crew of the Explorer were defending their position.

But his keen wit had not deserted him and his native cunning was at work. He had contrived to cut the cord which bound his wrists by getting hold of a knife which chanced to be near.

In an instant he was upon his feet and made a dive for an open window near. Pomp chanced to see him.

The darky grappled with him.

But the wily Arab was too much for Pomp. He flung him aside, and before Pomp could again get hold of him he had sprung through the window.

It was at this moment that the others made their appearance on the scene.

"Stop him!" cried Frank.

But it was too late. Wily Bel Ashan had cleared the window-sill and leaped from the Explorer's deck.

The travelers were just in time to see him vanish into the passage. But no time was lost.

"Catch him! Overtake him!" cried Frank. "He must not escape!" Pomp and Harold sprung through the window and after him. Down the passage they went in hot pursuit.

There was no little risk in this move, as appearances afterward showed.

CHAPTER X.

JUST TOO LATE.

For all they knew, there might be a strong guard of the Bedouins yet in the stronghold.

To invade it then in face of any overwhelming numbers would certainly mean recapture.

This thought occurred to both as they ran on.

But yet they would not turn back.

Harold thought of his captive sister, and was perfectly willing to risk his life to save her.

The light which was visible far down the passage every moment grew brighter and nearer.

They felt sure that they were rapidly nearing the robber's stronghold.

But strangely enough nothing could be seen of Sheik Bel Ashan.

What had become of the robber chief it was not easy to say. But a partial explanation was suddenly afforded.

For the two pursuers suddenly came to a diverging passage.

Beyond they saw the white pillars of another temple. One moment each hesitated, and Pomp said:

"Golly! Yo' sponse dey am gone dat way, chile?"

"No, I think not," said Harold. "At least we had better take the regular course. That is probably another method of entrance."

So they went on down the main passage. Soon the passage began to greatly broaden.

Then they saw the interior of the stronghold. It was the interior of a mighty high arched building.

Fires burned at different caverns and lit up the vast area. There were mighty pillars, a gorgeous peristyle and colonnade and high galleries.

The place seemed deserted. Not a Bedouin was in sight.

But as the two pursuers sprang into the vast court, the shrill neigh of a horse was heard and the clatter of hoofs.

Then followed a piercing feminine shriek:

"Help! Oh, God, help me!"

"It is Edith!" cried Harold, wildly. "Where is she? Edith!" he screamed, excitedly. "Where are you? Here I am! It is Harold!"

But in answer there was a harsh, mocking laugh.

Across the lower end of the court there dashed a horse white as driven snow.

Upon the animal's back was the Sheik Bel Ashan. In his arms he held a shrinking female form.

It was Edith Barcombe.

One moment only was the horse and its load in sight. Then the clatter of hoofs died out.

Bel Ashan, with his precious prisoner was gone.

The cunning Sheik had adopted a desperate move to win the game.

It was folly for Harold and Pomp to try to pursue him.

They stood irresolute a moment.

"Wha' am we gwine to do?" asked Pomp.

"I don't know," muttered Harold.

"Shall we chase dem?"

"Nö; we couldn't overtake him."

"Where am he gwine, do yo' flink?"

"I think that he is making for another part of the underground city, or—I have it! There is another entrance to this temple from the desert. He will try to escape in that direction."

"Does yo' believe dat?"

"Yes, let us go forward and locate it. Then we can return to the Explorer and decide what next to do."

"A'right sab, I'se ready!"

Harold led the way across the mighty court. As he had predicted a passage was reached beyond.

This had evidently been dug by human hands and doubtless extended to the outer air.

Satisfied of this Harold paused and was about to propose a return to the Explorer when a startling thing happened.

Suddenly and without warning four armed Bedouins sprang from a dark corner and with loud cries rushed upon the invaders.

Harold sprang backward just in time to ward off a swishing blow of a scimeter with his gun barrel.

He shouted to Pomp.

"Look out my friend! Don't give them close quarters!"

But Pomp was on his guard.

"Hi dar!" he cried. "I'se gwine to look out fo' dat chile!"

Then he discharged his rifle almost point blank at his first assailant. The fellow went down in an instant.

The second, however, made a wicked blow with his scimeter, which would have decapitated Pomp had it struck the mark.

But it passed a foot above his head, for the negro dodged.

Then Pomp, quick as a flash, closed with his opponent.

The scimeter was dashed from his grasp and a terrific wrestle followed.

Pomp was athletic and a good wrestler. The Bedouin was a match for him and the darky would have speedily mastered him.

But the shrewd fellow, realizing this, made a sudden break and dashed away into the shadows.

Pomp did not pursue.

He turned to assist Harold.

The young American had a knotty problem to solve. He had shot one of his assailants through the sword arm, but the fellow yet fought with his other arm.

His companion stood by him and Harold was busily employed warding off their blows with his gun barrel.

How the fight might have terminated it is not easy to say; but suddenly Pomp rushed in to Harold's aid.

This changed the programme.

The Bedouins were not looking for anything of this sort. One of them was knocked senseless by the darky.

The other broke away and fled, as had his companion.

Pomp and Harold were victors.

Neither had suffered a scratch. They could not forbear a cheer.

"What good luck!" cried Harold. "Come, Pomp, let's get out of here!"

"I see wld yo', sah."

Each took one of the keen scimeters away with him as a trophy.

They started now on the return to the Explorer.

As they drew nearer to it the rattle of fire-arms and the shouts of contestants could be heard.

It was evident that a battle was going on there.

Harold and Pomp both were anxious to get there and take part in it. They pressed forward eagerly.

But suddenly there came a tremendous roar.

It was like an earthquake shock. Harold and Pomp knew what it meant.

Frank had fired the electric gun.

There was a hush right after this, and the firing was desultory.

"Now is our time!" cried Harold. "Come on, Pomp!"

They ran forward quickly and soon had come in sight of the machine. A few moments more and they were clambering aboard.

"Well!" exclaimed Frank as they appeared. "What is the word?"

"We succeeded in finding the den!" cried Harold, "but the wretch has fled, with Edith in his arms!"

"Mercy! Is that true?" cried Frank. "Where has he gone?"

"I believe to the desert. There is another means of exit there!"

"Then we had better get out of here at once and give chase?"

"I should say so."

Frank sprang into the pilot house. The Bedouins had not yet recovered from the confusion caused by the last shot of the dynamite gun.

Frank sent the machine forward and right into their midst.

The heavy wheels bore down upon them mercilessly, and caused them to scatter in every direction.

The rout was complete. Barney and Pomp and Prof. Alwise kept up a constant fire.

Harold was by Frank's side in the pilot house. The machine had soon entered the main temple.

Threading its way among the huge pillars, it very quickly reached the mouth of the cave.

Out into the open air dashed the Explorer. It was with a sense of relief that the travelers emerged into the sunlight, hot though it was.

It was but a moment's work to run up out of the depression. Then they were upon the level plain once more.

Every eye swept the broad expanse.

"There!" cried Harold—"there goes the villain!"

Far out on the sandy waste was seen a little black speck. It was Sheik Bel Ashan.

Frank started the machine forward at full speed.

Of course the overtaking of the sheik and the rescue of Edith Barcombe was paramount to everything else now.

That the sheik would have been overtaken but for an incident was certain.

The machine was booming at a high rate of speed over the desert when suddenly and without warning there was a clicking sound, a dull whir, the Explorer ran a hundred yards further and stopped.

Perhaps the most astonished person on board was Prof. Alwise.

"Eh?" he gasped. "W-what has happened, Frank? Who stopped the machine?"

"It looks as if it had stopped of its own accord!" said Frank, looking at the key-board.

"Of its own accord?"

"Yes!"

"Ah, something has broke?"

"Precisely!"

Consternation seized upon the little party of desert explorers. It was a dismaying moment.

Frank at once shut off the madly whirring machinery. He went below decks.

A glance at the dynamos and he drew a breath of relief. Anything could be repaired but them.

"It is all right!" he said after a moment. "We shall be able to go on in a few hours."

"That is joyful!" cried the professor. "Then it is nothing permanent?"

"Oh, no!"

"But—how shall we overtake the sheik?" asked Harold, in dismay.

There, beneath a mighty pillar lay the crushed shape of the Explorer. Heartsick and half faint Frank crawled over the ruin, crying:

"Po— are you alive?"

"It is possible," came at a cry.

"That is dreadful luck, when we had him practically in our grasp!"

"Yes, but it cannot be helped. We must make the best of it. He will not be able to get far in a couple of hours!"

"Ah, but not many miles in that direction is the verge of the desert and the fertile valley of Kulp. If he reaches that he will have all of Central Africa to hide in."

"We will not believe that," said Frank, hopefully. "Keep up good heart, my friends. We will rescue Edith yet!"

But the forebodings of all were of the darkest kind.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER ATTACK.

FRANK at once began to overhaul the machinery of the Explorer. That it should break down at this critical moment was certainly a most exasperating thing.

There was nothing to do, however, but to make the best of it.

So Frank at once began work. He speedily located the derangement.

While he was at work upon it the others were scanning the desert. The sheik and his captive had faded from view. Harold had no doubt but that he meant to strike for Kulp.

But suddenly Barney shouted:

"Shure an' the haythins are coming out av the underground city."

This was true.

Every eye was turned in that direction.

The Arabs were coming out of the underground city and now they could be seen in concourse some two miles away.

They looked scarcely larger than flies at that distance. The travelers watched them for some time.

"They have good courage," said Prof. Alwise. "They are coming to see us!"

This was true.

The Bedouins were all mounted, and were coming down toward the machine. In a short while they were quite near.

But they did not venture within gunshot. They wisely kept out of range.

They made a circle about the machine, and contented themselves with fierce yells and savage gestures.

Darkness was now rapidly shutting down over the desert.

The sun was sinking into the sea of sand, and Frank declared:

"We shall not be able to leave here to-night, but I think we can proceed in the morning."

Harold received this announcement with a heart-sick feeling. He feared that his sister's fate was sealed.

Once her captor should succeed in penetrating the mighty region of Ethiopia, the chances of finding him would be infinitesimal.

Moreover, there were powerful nations of savage people there, more barbarous even than the Bedouins. The machine could hardly proceed thither with safety.

The Bedouins yet hovered about on the desert, like hyenas watching a prey which seemed certain to become theirs.

Frank worked at the broken machinery until a late hour.

Darkness most impenetrable had settled down over the desert. Barney was on guard forward.

Another attack from the Bedouins was not anticipated. But just before midnight it occurred to Barney to employ the search-light and find out, if possible, just what they were doing.

So the Cél mounted to the platform above and turned the light on. The sight which met his gaze was a surprising one.

As the glare of the electric light made a pathway as plain as day across the gleaming sands, it was seen to the surprise of all that the Bedouins were close about the machine.

Full two hundred of them were creeping cautiously toward the machine in the heavy sand.

A cry of warning went up.

"To arms!" shouted Harold Barcombe. "They mean to attack us!"

Indeed this was true.

A chorus of mad cries went up, and a legion of forms came surging out of the darkness.

Before even a move could be made for defense, they reached the wheels of the machine.

Up they came over the side swarming like bees to gain the upper deck.

Frank Reade, Jr., came bounding out of the engine room.

"Close every door and window!" he shouted. "Everybody at the loopholes!"

The order was obeyed.

This was in season to prevent any of the lawless crew from gaining an entrance to the machine.

But they were upon the lower deck or platform, and had begun pounding most furiously upon the doors.

The steel screens which covered the upper deck also became the recipient of fierce blows.

Something must be done and at once, it was evident, or they would certainly get the best of the fight.

Barney and Pomp were already at loopholes, and were firing with revolvers at close and deadly range.

All was a literal pandemonium.

But Frank had a more effective plan to outwit the foe.

He donned some rubber gloves, and carried a wire connected with the dynamos to the platform where was the search-light.

From here he was able to throw it like a lariat down among the lawless crew.

Wherever it struck, it created a terrific panic.

Men were knocked senseless and fell in literal heaps. One whole side of the machine was cleared.

Then Frank tried the wire on the other side and with good effect as well.

Men were hurled from the side of the machine by an unseen deadly power.

Those who were not killed by the shock fled to return no more, the experience being enough.

Thus in a few moments the attacking party were at arm's length, and the defenders of the Explorer were able to use their rifles.

These were the weapons which told the tale. Fired in swift order, so that a rattling volley was constantly kept up, the Bedouins were bound to fall back.

The attack ended in a repulse.

It was a wonderful victory for the defenders of the machine.

They had good reason to feel well satisfied. They made the air ring with their cheers.

The Bedouins did not return to the attack. The repulse proved sufficient to restrain them.

An hour later Frank came again on deck.

He stepped into the pilot-house and swept the plain with the search light. He located the Bedouins.

They were gathered in a body now, but just out of range.

Frank scrutinized them a moment, and said:

"We will leave them behind. When we have run a safe distance then we will camp again and try to get some sleep. I feel the need of it greatly."

"What!" cried the professor; "you don't mean to tell me, Frank, that you have the machine in working order again?"

"You shall see."

Frank pressed the motor lever. At once the Explorer began to move.

A moment more and it was rolling away over the plain at the same tremendous rate of speed as usual.

Before many minutes had passed the Bedouins were left out of sight altogether. A half hour later the machine was again brought to a halt.

This was in a little depression in the plain.

"We will camp here for the night," said Frank. "To-morrow morning let all be astir early; we will again go on our way."

All cheered heartily.

The watch was divided between Barney and Pomp for the rest of the night; but a few hours remained.

But even that amount of refreshing sleep had its good effect and all arose the next morning much recuperated.

At an early hour the machine was again under way.

Not a living being was in sight anywhere. Not until noon was there any change in the country.

Then, a dark line was seen to the southward. On nearer approach waving green palms were seen.

"An oasis!" cried Professor Alwise.

But Harold Barcombe shook his head.

"No!" he said, "it is the fertile land of Kulp. Ah, I fear I shall never see my sister again!"

"Keep up good heart!" said Frank quietly, "there is nothing impossible."

The machine rapidly drew nearer the fertile tract. And now far to the southward mighty mountain ranges were to be seen.

It was true that they had reached the lower end of Sahara and were in the most barbarous region in the world.

Here dwelt tribes not classified or known by the historian or chronicler. Barbarous, untaught and thievish.

Even as the machine entered the fertile land, a walled city rose before their view.

It was not a large town, but entirely surrounded by a moat and a high wall of rough stone.

"A walled city!" cried Prof. Alwise, with interest. "I must not lose this opportunity."

And out came the scientist's notebook and he proceeded to preserve his impression of the curious place.

A horde of savages, half naked horsemen, vanished through the high gate as the machine approached.

It closed behind them. Upon the walls were a number of soldiers, half naked barbarians with lances.

The whole country was a desolate and wretched region.

The dwellers in the place evidently did not till the soil. No fertile farms or crops were to be seen.

"No!" said Prof. Alwise, impressively, "they make their living by preying upon caravans. They are natural thieves and highwaymen. Woe to the luckless traveler who falls into their clutches!"

"Right!" declared Harold. "It is short shrift and farewell to life. They are a merciless set!"

"Then it is among these people that Bel Ashan will seek a hiding place?" asked Frank.

"Yes."

"It is by no means a secure one. With a few shots from our dynamite gun I could blow their wall into smithereens."

"Very true. But you will find that they will fight savagely."

"Let us parley with them."

"It is of no use!"

"Why not?"

"You will find that they cannot speak any language but their own."

"At least it will do no harm to try."

"Certainly not."

So with this resolution Frank ran the machine right up to the gate of the walled city.

"Heigho!" he shouted in French. "Who is your spokesman? Send him out!"

The half naked lancers dodged down behind the wall. Frank repented the hail. But they did not seem to understand.

At that moment though a most astounding and unlooked-for thing happened. A familiar voice came down from above and a familiar form appeared on the wall of the barbarian city.

It was Bel Ashan.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WALLED CITY.

"EFFENDI has called," he shouted, "and I will answer."

"Good!" cried Frank. "You are just the man we want. I am glad that we have run you down."

"What do you want?"

"We want you to surrender. Produce the young girl whom you hold as a captive, or we will blow your city to powder!"

"Before you can do that," sneered Bel Ashan, "I can turn three thousand warriors upon you!"

"I don't care for a million of your warriors. Take my word for it, I can whip them all."

"I refuse to surrender. Before another hour your heads shall hang upon the gates of Kulp."

With this Bel Ashan vanished. A fearful din arose, and the walls fairly swarmed with barbarians.

They began to hurl javelins and arrows at the machine.

But of course its steel armor turned them off as water from the back of a duck.

"I am going through that place," said Frank resolutely. "Look out every one!"

He sprang to the dasher and elevated the electric gun.

He took careful sight and fired.

The projectile struck the gate of the walled city, and there was an earthquake shock.

Pieces of the structure were hurled hundreds of yards away.

Once again Frank fired.

This time a hole was literally blown through the thick wall of cobble.

It was plain that the dynamite gun could batter the place down with ease.

The barbarian race swarmed out of the fallen gate and started to attack the machine.

But Frank fired two electric bolts straight at their feet. A heap of sand and debris ten feet high was raised.

Half a hundred of the wretches were blown into eternity.

This was enough.

Such treatment could not fail in its terrifying effect.

They broke ranks and fled incontinently.

The machine pressed forward rapidly, and the next moment was in the city.

A horde of women and children were huddled upon the housetops. Frank could not make warfare with them.

But he sent one electric projectile after another after the fleeing Kulpites, and fairly drove them from their city.

The terrible thunder of the dynamite bombs, and their frightful work was enough to frighten the stoutest heart.

The Kulpites were driven literally out of their city. Bel Ashan had fled at the first onslaught.

He had taken Edith Barcombe with him. His course was down the valley.

Frank had no further quarrel with the Kulpites.

He simply wished to capture Bel Ashan, so he pressed on in pursuit of him.

This left the terrified Kulpites to recover from their fright as best they could.

When Bel Ashan heard the deadly Explorer thundering at his heels he was indeed terrified.

Self-preservation is nature's first law, it is said. The wily Sheikh saw that the double weight was telling upon his horse.

He would be overtaken. That would mean practically death. He hesitated some while before taking the action which he saw was necessary.

Then he suddenly reined up his horse.

Edith Barcombe was bound to the saddle in front of him. The sheik cut her bonds and hissed:

"It is a lucky escape for you, my pearl! I give you up now to save my life, but I will reclaim you later, for those Christian dogs shall never get out of this country alive!"

Edith fell to the ground and the sheik galloped madly on.

The next moment the Explorer came to a halt and Harold was over the fall in a twinkling.

"Edith!" he cried, wildly—"my darling sister! You are safe!"

Joyous was that meeting between brother and sister. She was taken aboard the machine and carefully cared for.

There was no thought of pursuing the Sheik Bel Ashan further. The main object of the expedition—the rescue of Edith Barcombe—had been accomplished.

"Now, professor!" cried Frank, "we are ready to help you out with your archaeological studies. Suppose we attend to that now."

"I am more than agreeable!" cried the professor, eagerly.

"Do you wish to return to the underground city?"

"No, I think not. I would prefer to take the old ruins north of here and on the line to Cairo. There are many there which I am sure have never been explored."

"It shall be so."

So the course of the machine was set in that direction.

Edith and Harold were promised safe transportation home to America as soon as Cairo was reached.

In the meantime they were very happy and not at all impatient.

Edith was a very beautiful girl. She was instantly a favorite with all.

"I shall be so glad to see my dear father," she said. "I can hardly remember him. I was so young when we were separated."

"You may be sure he will be glad to see you," said Frank. "He is praying hourly for your safe return."

The machine now headed to the northward.

A course along the verge of the desert was kept, and one day ruins were sighted to the east.

At once the machine started for them. Prof. Alwise was all excitement.

As they drew nearer the ruins of a mighty Egyptian temple were seen. The machine bore down for them rapidly.

The temple was partly buried in the sand, but its architecture was seen to be of the grandest.

The machine halted under the main portico which was fully fifty feet high and guarded by huge stone sphinxes.

The professor at once brought out his archaeological tools and started into the ruin.

There seemed no danger from Bedouin foes, for the exploring party seemed the only human beings in the vicinity.

In a few moments the professor was breaking open mummy cases, recovering scarabens and Egyptian MS. in abundance.

He was extremely enthusiastic in his work and forgetful of all about him.

Frank proposed that he and Barney should also take a trip through the ruins.

Harold Barcombe insisted upon going, and Edith cried:

"Well, I object to being left behind. I claim the right to go, too!"

"It is yours," said Frank, laughing. "If you care to brave the perils."

"I think I can safely do so," said the young girl, cheerfully. "At least I am not afraid."

"Well said. I will try and see that no harm comes to you!"

Preparations was quickly made.

"You will remain aboard the machine and look out for things, Pomp," said Frank.

"A'right, sah!" agreed the darky.

Barney and Frank, Harold and Edith now set out into the ruins, leaving Pomp and the machine behind.

The professor was seen not fifty yards distant intently engaged in his work.

Truly the ruins were something enormous in extent.

The explorers gazed upon them with interest and wonderment.

"What do you make of it, Alwise?" cried Frank, "is this a solitary monument in the desert, or was it once part of a city?"

"I am inclined to the latter supposition!" replied the professor.

"It must have been a powerful big city, if this is a sample of its buildings."

"There is no doubt but that it was."

Leaving the professor absorbed in his work, the party strolled through the ruins.

Many curious hieroglyphics were to be seen upon the walls and pillars. In the center court was an obelisk of great height.

Finally, tiring of the expedition, the party started to return to the machine.

They were strolling slowly along, when suddenly Barney cried:

"Begorra, wud yez luk at that? Shure, the walls are falling!"

Then the explorers beheld an astounding sight.

The entire front of the ruin, with its massive portico and row of mighty columns, tottered and fell outward.

There was a thunderous roar, and the ground trembled as with an earthquake shock.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., gave an awful cry of horror.

"My God, the machine!" he shrieked.

The same horrible reflection swept over all.

The Explorer had been left upon the other side of that mighty wall of stone. In its fall it must have become engulfed.

Edith nearly fainted with the force of the shock. The knees of the men smote and their faces were ashen.

There was no doubt but that the Explorer was under that ruin.

And Pomp—what would save him? It was an awful moment.

Frank Reade, Jr., was the first to recover. The professor, white faced, had turned from his work.

The young inventor cried:

"Come, we must know the truth!"

Frank sprang forward, determined to know the worst. As he neared the ruin he saw that his worst fears were confirmed.

He hurried on deck, and bringing the search-light to bear on it, waited for the fun.

"To his joy and amazement, he came back."

"It's a'right, Marse Frank. Jes' gib dis chile time!"

Then out from the debris crawled Pomp. How he had so wonderfully escaped uninjured was not to be easily understood.

It was a literal miracle.

And all were so overjoyed to know that he was safe that they nigh forgot the awful calamity which had deprived them of the machine and the only visible means of getting out of the desert.

When this came upon them full force the effect was terrible.

The machine was certainly beyond repair. It could never be put into running order again.

Aghast at the situation all stood staring at each other.

"We are lost!" said Alwise, hopelessly.

"No!" declared Harold, firmly. "If we can only keep clear of the Bedouins we shall be all right. We can gradually make our way to Cairo."

"But we shall never be able to do that!" cried Frank with horror, "for there they are now!"

Into the ruin there dashed a body of horsemen, and at their head was the cruel Sheik Mahmoud Bey.

The situation was one of the gravest kind. For a moment an awful still horror seized upon our explorers.

Then Prof. Alwise said:

"We are lost!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

THEN the reaction came.

Frank Reade, Jr., sprang from behind the cover of a pile of stones and cried:

"To cover, every one! We will sell our lives as dearly as possible!"

Fortunately all were armed with repeating rifles. They did not hesitate to obey Frank's command.

The Bedouins had sighted them, and with exultant cries were coming to the attack.

The Americans fired a volley, and a number of the Bedouins fell. They were checked but a moment, however.

Then they came on again.

It was likely that the fate of the party would have been sealed at that moment, but for an incident.

Suddenly Harold shouted:

"Look out! They are in our rear!"

This seemed true.

Suddenly into the ruin in the rear of the defenders there appeared a party of horsemen.

They were richly dressed in uniforms of scarlet and gold.

To the surprise of all but Harold, the Bedouins suddenly took to their heels. A wild cheer escaped the uniformed guard.

A body of them went in pursuit. Others surrounded the Americans.

"It's all right!" cried Harold. "It is the sultan's guard."

"The sultan's guard!" exclaimed Frank.

"Yes. We are saved!"

This was even so.

The next moment a dapper little Turkish officer had dismounted, and was saluting the party.

He spoke in the French language.

"You are Ingleez. We give you the sultan's protection."

"Which we will gladly accept," cried Frank, readily. "You have come just in the nick of time."

By the merest chance Abou Ben Hassan, the sultan's military commander, had been crossing the desert and happened upon the ruin.

The Bedouins were not overtaken, and escaped into the desert.

But arrangements were quickly made with Ben Hassan by which the party was to be safely escorted to the American Consulate at Cairo. Horses were furnished and the start was made.

There was little that could be saved from the Explorer's wreck.

Frank decided to leave it there, and declared:

"Never mind; I will yet build a machine to beat that all to pieces."

Soon the party were under way to Cairo. Four days' later they reached the heights which looked down upon the city of the desert.

The party were well received in Cairo, though they did not linger long there.

They were all anxious to get back to America, so an outgoing steamer took them to the Mediterranean.

In course of time the stormy Atlantic was safely crossed. Once more they were in America.

Cable dispatches had been sent from London to Mr. Barcombe and he was at the landing to meet them.

We will not dwell upon that happy reunion between father and children.

The whole country heard of the famous exploit and fresh laurels were added to the fame of Frank Reade, Jr., the wonderful young inventor.

Prof. Alwise went back to the Smithsonian Institute and proceeded to write a learned lecture upon Archaeology.

Frank and Barney and Pomp in due time arrived safely in Readestown.

The young inventor, true to his word, at once went to work upon a new invention, and this brings to an end our story.

[THE END.]

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